

February 24, 2022

Testimony in favor of the Governor's proposed \$3.6MM ARPA spending on gun violence prevention

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, ranking members Miner and France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jonathan Perloe. I'm director of communications for CT Against Gun Violence, and have advocated for gun violence prevention measures for the past nine years, since the Sandy Hook School tragedy.

I am testifying in favor of Gov. Lamont's proposed American Rescue Plan Act allocation of \$3.6 million over two years to fund community gun violence prevention and intervention programs. We also support his proposal, in [Senate Bill 16](#), to have the Department of Public Health Office of Injury Prevention create a statewide strategy for community violence prevention and intervention.

While Connecticut has a gun death [rate](#) 56 percent lower than the national average, we still have an unacceptably high level of gun homicide. At 118 deaths, gun homicide last year reached a 25-year high, nearly double what it was in 2018. These killings disproportionately victimize Black and brown communities, especially young Black men who account for about 45 percent of gun homicides.

We are at a turning point, where there is broad consensus that more needs to be spent on anti-violence prevention and intervention programs to complement our strong gun laws and law enforcement efforts.

The governor's proposal is a good start; but we believe the legislature needs to do more. It should invest more funds in community-based prevention programs, and ensure there is dedicated staff in the Department of Public Health to support the effort.

DPH simply can't address this public health crisis without a commitment to hire professionals who have the time and expertise to craft an appropriate public health response based on community input, and who can secure funding, establish grant-making criteria, provide technical assistance, measure results and ensure accountability.

That's why CAGV and our more than 50 [partners](#) in the CT Initiative to Prevent Community Gun Violence have called on the State to create an Office of Gun Violence Prevention within DPH, tasked with funding and implementing evidence-informed, community-centric, programs and strategies to reduce street-level gun violence.

With the potential for significant funding coming from the federal government, it's important the State has the capacity to secure its fair share. This shouldn't be an ad hoc, short-term endeavor; it requires dedicated staff.

The case for action is strong. Around the nation, and in Connecticut, various program models have [proven track records](#) of reducing interpersonal gun violence using prevention, intervention and after-care approaches.

Connecticut has the resources to provide incremental funding beyond the Governor's proposed \$3.6 million. The state's [projected](#) budget surplus exceeds \$2 billion. If the state

can afford \$336 million in tax cuts, as [proposed](#) by the Governor, it should be able to afford more than \$3.6 million from the \$6.3 billion of federal grants coming into the state from ARPA.

Although saving lives is reason enough to invest in community-based anti-violence programs, it is also a fiscally prudent strategy.

According to [Everytown](#) and [Giffords Law Center](#), it's estimated that gun violence (of all kinds) costs Connecticut taxpayers between \$60 and \$90 million annually. A different study [estimated](#) that the law enforcement and healthcare costs of a single gun homicide are \$488,000, and that each non-fatal shooting costs \$71,000. These costs are largely borne by taxpayers. By that estimate, last year's 118 gun homicides alone cost Connecticut taxpayers more than \$50 million.

Through legislative and executive action, states across the country are investing in the organization infrastructure to fund, implement and support community-based violence prevention programs such as those proposed by the CT Initiative. These include California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Virginia. These are detailed in my written testimony.

There are life-saving solutions to be found in violence intervention and prevention programs operating at the local level. Connecticut needs to invest in the organizational infrastructure to find, fund and follow these programs. We welcome the Governor's allocation, but given the magnitude of the crisis, more needs to be spent.

Thank you for considering my testimony, and your work to make all communities in Connecticut safe from gun violence.

Jonathan Perloe
Director of Communications
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Appendix

States that have established intentional efforts to address community violence.

In November 2021, Illinois Gov. Pritzker [signed an executive order](#) declaring gun violence a public health crisis and committed \$250 million to “directly reduce and interrupt violence in our neighborhoods.” The order further funds the Reimagine Public Safety plan, a data-driven and community-based violence prevention strategy, and creates a new Office of Firearm Violence Prevention, which will give technical assistance, training and policy recommendations to Illinois communities with the highest rates of gun violence.

In June 2021, Colorado Gov. Polis signed a [bill](#) creating an Office of Gun Violence Prevention, tasked with gun violence prevention education, establishing a grant program to fund community-based prevention programs and coordinating data collection and research. The Office is housed in the Dept of Public Health and Environment, with an executive director and at least two full-time staff. Its first year appropriation is \$3 million.

In 2019 the California Violence Intervention and Prevention ([CalVIP](#)) Grant Program was established by the legislature to appropriate \$30 million to cities and community-based organizations with the purpose of reducing homicide, shootings and aggravated assault through evidence-based initiatives.

In Massachusetts, the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative ([SSYI](#)) is a standing program to fund ongoing efforts that focus on reducing violence among high-risk youth. Funding has ranged from \$4.5 million to \$11.4 million since it began in 2012. Cities where SSYI funded programs operate have seen a reduction of more than 5 violent crime victims per 100,000 residents, representing nearly 1,000 victimizations prevented over a three-year period from 2011-2013.

New Jersey [signed into law](#) a Violence Intervention Program in 2020, and has since [awarded](#) \$20 million in multi-year grant funding to nine hospital-based violence intervention programs.

Also in 2020, Virginia General Assembly [established](#) the Virginia Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention Fund to make grants to support evidence-informed gun violence intervention and prevention efforts. Gov. Northam proposed and the legislature [approved](#) \$2.6 million in funding for the 2021-22 biennial budget.

In 2018 the Maryland legislature established the Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program ([VIPP](#)) with \$4 million of seed money. In consultation with the VIPP Advisory Board, the Governor’s Office of Crime Control and Prevention administers the program to provide competitive grants to local governments and nonprofit organizations to fund evidence-based health programs or evidence-informed health programs.

Here is a [roundup](#) of federal, state and municipal news regarding creation and funding of the capacity to support community violence intervention programs.